

16-10-17

# Behold the New Emperor of China

**Xi Jinping is the most powerful leader since Mao, and he is set to hold power for as long as he wants.**

Graham Allison

The Chinese Communist Party's 19th Party Congress will convene Wednesday to select leaders for the next generation. Few events will have greater impact on the shape of world politics.

The script for the Party Congress hasn't been revealed, but I am betting that Xi Jinping will not only be "re-elected" to a second five-year term as the party's general secretary and China's president, but also that **he will effectively be crowned China's 21st-century emperor.**

**Every member of the seven-man Politburo Standing Committee will be a reliable Xi loyalist.** Among them will be Mr. Xi's closest associate, Wang Qishan, who spearheaded Mr. Xi's anticorruption inquisition. That campaign rewrote the rules for doing business in China and restored a sense of fear (of jail) among party cadres and the moneyed class.

Custom requires Chinese leaders to retire by 68, so the 69-year-old Mr. Wang's continued place on the committee—along with the conspicuous lack of any visible successor to Mr. Xi—will set the stage for Mr. Xi to remain China's leader for as long as he chooses. As this new reality sinks in, Americans will ask: Who is Xi Jinping? For a start, let me offer **five tweet-sized points.**

**First, he will increasingly be recognized as the most powerful leader of China since Mao Zedong.** Mr. Xi is overshadowing even Deng Xiaoping, who buried Soviet-style economics and replaced it with the party-led market capitalism that has produced three decades of double-digit economic growth.

**Second, Mr. Xi is the most ambitious leader on the international stage today.** Long before Donald Trump pledged to "make America great again," Mr. Xi declared his intention to do the same for China. His 2012 banner stated his vision for the "Chinese Dream": "the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation." To that end, he's undertaken four revolutions: turning China's export-led economy into a world leader in innovation and high-value manufacturing, fueled by the world's largest consumer middle class, while maintaining economic growth above 6.5%; reorganizing and rebuilding China's military so that it can, as Mr. Xi says, "fight and win" against a modern adversary (such as the U.S.); reviving nationalism and pride in the restoration of a Great China; and, most critically, revitalizing the party and re-establishing its authority. Any one of these initiatives would overwhelm most heads of state. Mr. Xi is managing all four at once.

**Third, he is the most surprising leader on the international stage today.** In a field that includes Vladimir Putin, Kim Jong Un and Donald Trump, this claim may seem exaggerated. But recall the conditions in 2012, when Mr. Xi was appointed to succeed Hu Jintao. Like Mr. Hu, Mr. Xi was expected to be a bland figurehead and technocratic spokesman of a nine-man collective leadership. The skill, speed and determination with which he has effected a regime transformation to charismatic one-man rule is stunning. Never before has a nation risen so far, so fast, on so many dimensions as China has over the

past generation. The same could be said of Mr. Xi, who went from a politically exiled peasant living in a cave to “Chairman of Everything.”

Moreover, his choice to upend Deng’s policy—“hide China’s capabilities and bide our time”—has blindsided the international community. From China’s new Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, which has overshadowed the World Bank, to his massive geoeconomic master plan known as “One Belt, One Road” financing 900 infrastructure and business projects at a cost exceeding \$1.4 trillion (the equivalent of 12 Marshall Plans), he is nothing if not audacious. As the U.S. has retreated from its traditional role on the world stage, Mr. Xi has moved swiftly to fill the void, shocking the Davos elite in 2017 when he proclaimed himself,—to little dissent,—champion of the new global liberal economic order.

**Fourth, Mr. Xi is the most effective global leader today.** Assess China’s performance over his first five years: revitalizing a party that many Western analysts believed would soon fall to the “inevitable” march of democracy, maintaining robust economic growth when so many expected crisis and collapse, and asserting China’s power abroad against all competitors, getting his way from the South China Sea to the Himalayas.

**Finally, of all the leaders on the international stage, Mr. Xi will be the most consequential.** This is not simply because he rules a nation of 1.4 billion people and an economy that overtook the U.S. in 2014 to become the largest in the world (measured by purchasing power parity, which both the International Monetary Fund and CIA regard as the single best yardstick). By the end of his second term, China’s economy is on pace to be 40% larger than America’s.

At that point he will have firmly established Beijing as the capital—and Xi Jinping as the man—to which a world looking for growth and stability turns first. China will have been restored to its position as the “sun” around which the nations of Asia orbit—as they did in earlier millennia. And Mr. Xi will have become the modern emperor of China.

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